

## Awaiting the Main Act

December 6, 2020, Second Sunday of Advent

Gospel of Mark 1:1-8

Fr. John

Many of us at one time or another have attended a live concert featuring a famous and internationally acclaimed artist. However, before he or she appears, there was often a 'warm-up' group or performer who comes on. The purpose of this, of course, is to help get the audience into an even higher state of anticipation of what's to come when the featured performer finally makes their appearance on stage.

Well, today's gospel in some ways follows that kind of a format. John the Baptist is the 'warm-up' act for Jesus the Messiah.

In fact John is so successful in his role, that many thought that he *was THE main act*. Like many of the rock stars of today, he bounces into the public domain with a loud vocal message; wears outlandish clothing and generally appeals to peoples' desire for something 'completely different' [a la Monty Python]. And what's more, his appearances are sold out. According to Mark's account, 'people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people from Jerusalem were going out to him.'

But John, unlike modern day 'warm-up' performers, who dream of becoming the main event themselves someday, knew that he wasn't to be that. He knew what his role was. ['The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals']

So what about us - do we know what our role is? Often our ego gets the better of us and tries to convince us that we don't have to play 'second fiddle' to anyone. But playing a supportive role doesn't mean that we are unimportant. In fact, like a 'warm-up' performer who readies an audience, we might be crucial in introducing Jesus to others.

If we claim to be disciples of Jesus, others must be able to identify his qualities in us, who profess him as Lord. Otherwise we are simply throwing doctrines and religious platitudes at others and expecting them to believe.

Matthew Kelly, whose books most of you are familiar with, has stated that good leaders must first of all be good followers. In other words, discipleship, which involves listening and learning, comes before apostleship wherein we take on the role of teaching and leading. However, most of us know that even when we take on roles of leadership - we must still continue to listen and learn.

A child will often ask, during a long car ride: 'Are we there yet?' We are never 'there' insofar as our deepest yearnings and longings in life are never fully realized.

But we do live in the anticipation that ultimately those longings will be fulfilled and we see inklings of that in our everyday lives wherein we witness to acts of kindness and compassion which are the foretaste of God's ultimate act of love exemplified in the person of Jesus.

Advent represents that holy longing within each human heart. As St. Augustine put it: 'You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You'.

Yes, we wait in anticipation for a number of events to take place, including a vaccine that will spell the end of the coronavirus; we yearn for an end of the isolation it has caused for so many; we long for the time when we will be able to be with others in an 'in person' manner; we look forward to the regaining of employment for many who have lost their jobs.

In the midst of all this we ultimately look forward to the coming celebration of Christ's birth into the world - a sign that God has not forgotten his people and is still present among us. However, in the meantime, may we prove to be good 'warm-up' acts, doing what we can and whatever is asked of us during this season of our longing - an Advent perhaps like no other in our lifetime. May we be the voice calling out a message of hope and encouragement in a wilderness of desperation. And in the words of Isaiah, the prophet, being heralds of Good News proclaiming tidings of comfort and joy